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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001964

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TAGS: IZ PGOV PTER

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR, CG MEET WITH PM FOLLOWING SAMARRA
SHRINE ATTACK: CURFEW IMPOSED, EXTRA SECURITY AROUND
RELIGIOUS SITES

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador and Commanding General (CG) met with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki June 13 within hours of the attack on the al-Askari mosque in Samarra to discuss immediate next steps. The PM imposed a curfew beginning at 1500 local time in Baghdad and called for extra security around mosques and religious sites throughout Iraq, focusing specifically on Sunni mosques in Baghdad. He said that he would meet with the Presidency Council to project an image of national solidarity. Political leaders, including Moqtada al-Sadr and Adnan al-Duleimi, issued statements (septel) denouncing the attacks and warning all Iraqis against retaliatory actions. The Prime Minister expressed frustration at the insufficient abilities of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the delay in transferring full security authority to the Government of Iraq (GOI). The PM did agree, however, on the need to "look forward" and work together to defuse tensions. S/I Satterfield and Major General Fastabend were also present.

End Summary.

NEXT STEPS: CURFEW, PROTECTING RELIGIOUS SITES

¶2. (C) The CG told the PM that Coalition Forces (CF) will fly General Adnan Thabat, the appointed Samarra Brigade Commander, to the site of the attack and will ensure the expedited movement of additional security forces to the area.

The PM ordered a curfew in Baghdad to begin at 1500 local time. Noting the difficulty in containing "extremist Shia elements" determined to stage reprisal attacks, the PM ordered extra security at holy sites throughout Iraq, citing specifically two Sunni mosques in Baghdad: Abu Hanifa mosque, the most important Sunni holy site in Baghdad located in the Sunni-dominated Adhamiyah area, and Abdulqadir al-Jilani mosque, named after the founder of the Qadriya Sufi order and recently attacked May 28.

¶3. (C) The PM further demanded that ISF increase scrutiny at checkpoints, especially on the canals and roadways adjacent to Sadr City. The Ambassador suggested that the PM identify those mosques and holy places which are most vulnerable, cautioning that the GOI should not exclude the possibility that al-Qaida will attack another Shia site. The PM responded that he anticipates the likely reaction to be against Sunni sites but agreed that as a precaution all holy places should receive extra protection. The PM asked for aerial support to protect the Ministry of Oil against mortars and rockets; the CG agreed.

¶4. (C) On the political side, the PM said he had already spoken with Moqtada al-Sadr who asked what he could do to help. "Issue a statement," the PM said he told al-Sadr. Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (ISCI) leader Abdulaziz al-Hakim will issue a statement from Iran, the PM noted, urging people to avoid retaliatory attacks. The PM had

spoken with Sunni and Shia religious leaders requesting that they issue fatwas condemning the attack and prohibiting violent reactions. (Note: Statements from Iraq's political leaders and reactions in the aftermath of the attack will be reported septel. End Note.) Finally, the PM said he will meet later with the Presidency Council to further discuss the situation.

PM CONCERNED ISF WERE COMPLICIT IN ATTACK

¶ 15. (C) The CG offered the PM the most recent details, noting that information continues to be received and new details emerge. MG Fastabend stated there were two explosions which initial reports suggested might have been mortar or rocket attacks. However, based on the damage to the two minarets this appears unlikely. According to MNF-I information approximately 40 Iraqi Police from the Tikrit Emergency Support Unit (a SWAT-like unit as opposed to local police) guarded the perimeter while approximately 10 Facilities Protection Service (FPS) personnel from the Ministry of Interior were inside the building. Additional reports suggest that a small-arms firefight erupted at the time of the explosion. MG Fastabend concluded that it appears, based on the damage, that the explosives were previously placed. This suggests the ISF protecting the shrine may have been complicit in the attack, the PM stated, noting that "the people of Samarra are intimidated by al-Qaida" and forced into executing their orders.

PM FRUSTRATED BY ISF CAPABILITIES

¶ 16. (C) The PM noted his previous warnings that attacks on

BAGHDAD 00001964 002 OF 002

religious sites could spark a significant increase in sectarian tension and expressed frustration that more security forces were not in place to protect the al-Askari Mosque. The PM further noted his dissatisfaction with the progress of the development and fielding of the ISF and his unhappiness that they continue to be blamed for not providing security even though "the security file is in US hands." Offering condolences to all Iraqis, the Ambassador urged the PM to approach this crisis in the spirit of understanding and cooperation and to reach out to all of Iraq's political leaders. The CG urged the PM to look forward and resist assigning blame, noting that MNF-I is only partially responsible for delays in building the security forces, gently reminding the PM of the inability of Iraq to field leaders for their new units. The CG emphasized that MNF-I takes its responsibility to build, train and support the ISF very seriously and wants to "move forward" in the wake of this latest attack to prevent subsequent violence.

¶ 17. (C) Comment: Maliki has said and done the right things in the aftermath of the bombing: a curfew, clearly identifying al-Qaida as the enemy targeting both Shia and Sunnis, protection for Sunni shrines, outreach to the Sunni leadership (Sunni VP al-Hashemi told the Ambassador after the Presidency Council meeting that it had been very positive with Maliki making clear that he was very focused on preventing retaliation), and an MNF-facilitated visit to Samarra. The coming days will determine whether these efforts will be sufficient to prevent a new wave of sectarian violence.

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